

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOGADISCIO 0911

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, SO, US

SUBJECT: SOVIET FACILITIES AT BERBERA: BRIEFING PROBLEMS

REF: A. MOGADISCIO 0672 B. MOGADISCIO 908

1. FALSE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN INITIALLY BY BURT QUINT OF CBS NEWS AS RESULT OF TWO-HOUR BERBERA TOUR (REF B) SHOW SPECIAL HAZARDS OF BERBERA INSPECTION EFFORT UNDF SOMALI AUSPICES, EVEN FOR PROFESSIONAL OBSERVER. QUINT WAS PROFESSIONAL WHO WAS WELL BRIEFED IN ADVANCE. BUT HE IS JOURNALIST OF INTEGRITY AS WELL AND BECAUSE OF THAT WAS ABLE TO AMEND HIS CONCLUSIONS PRIOR TO THEIR PUBLICATION. WE MAY NOT BE SO LUCKY NEXT TIME.

2. INITIAL PROBLEM FACING QUINT, AS WELL AS ANY OTHER GROUP OF OBSERVERS ARRIVING IN SOMALIA, IS IN ABANDONING SOME OF THOSE MENTAL IMAGES CONJURED UP BY PRESS REPORTS ABOUT SOVIET BASE AT BERBERA. AS NOTED IN MOGADISCIO 672, SOMALIA IS BARREN EMPTY COUNTRY, BERBERA IS TORRID BACKWATER PORT -- PHYSICAL FACTS WHICH TEND TO REDUCE RELEVANCE OF ANY INSTALLATION SEEN THEREIN.

3. IN INITIAL BRIEFING SESSION WITH QUINT JUNE 19 PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR BERBERA, IT WAS APPARENT THAT HE WAS VERY MUCH PRISONER OF SUBIC BAY MENTALITY IN VISUALIZING SOVIET FACILITIES AT BERBERA. FIRST HOUR I SPENT WITH HIM ON JUNE 19 WAS IN SCALING DOWN SIZE OF HIS EXPECTATIONS, A PROCESS
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WHICH DID NOT RPT NOT DIMINISH IN ANY WAY THE GRAVITY OF WHAT

REMAINED. I ALSO BRIEFED HIM ON SOMALI POLITICAL SCENE AND OVERPOWERING SOVIET ROLE HERE, AN ASPECT WHICH IS VITAL IN PUTTING SOVIET FACILITIES IN CONTEXT.

4. WHEN QUINT RETURNED FROM BERBERA ON JUNE 26, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS FULLY CONVINCED THAT HE HAD SEEN EVERYTHING AT BERBERA, THAT THE SOVIET BASE HAD BEEN GROSSLY EXAGGERATED AND THAT NOTHING OF SIGNIFICANCE WAS APPARENT. I BELIEVE HE ALSO WAS DEEPLY SKEPTICAL OF VALIDITY OF CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY US INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS ON BASIS OF BERBERA PHOTOGRAPHY. HE ASKED ME FINALLY IF I MYSELF WAS HONESTLY CONVINCED OF PRESENCE OF SOVIET MISSILE HANDLING FACILITY.

5. I TOLD HIM THAT I WAS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT THE FACILITY WAS THERE, THAT IF THE VISUAL EVIDENCE HE HAD SEEN WAS SLIGHT, NEVERTHELESS THE FACILITY EXISTED. I REMINDED HIM THAT PALEONTOLOGISTS COULD PUT TOGETHER AN EXTINCT SPECIES ON THE BASIS OF SINGLE KNEE JOINT AND THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO US ANALYSTS IN INTERPRETING THE DETAILS OF THE MISSILE HANDLING FACILITY AT BERBERA WENT MUCH BEYOND THAT . (AT THAT TIME, HE STILL BELIEVED THAT HE HAD SEEN THE MISSILE FACILITY -- AN ERROR HE CORRECTED WHEN WE WENT OVER THE PHOTOGRAPHS AT EMBASSY.)

6. FINALLY, QUINT WAS TRYING TO GO AS FAR AS HE COULD IN CORROBORATING SOVIET FACILITIES AT BERBERA AND IN SUSTAINING DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TESTIMONY. SOME US AND OTHER JOURNALISTS COMING TO MOGADISCIO WILL NOT RPT NOT BE SO SYMPATHETIC OR SO ACCESSIBLE. THOSE US OFFICIALS WHO DO BRIEF US NEWSMEN PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL IN MOGADISCIO -- WHETHER IN WASHINGTON, ADDIS OR NAIROBI -- MIGHT KEEP ABOVE POINTS IN MIND.

7. IN CASE OF SENATORIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL GROUPS, THOSE US OFFICIALS WHO ACCOMPANY THEM SHOULD HAVE PHOTOS AND MAP OF BERBERA BETTER THAN THOSE SUPPLIED QUINT. IN ARRANGING THEIR TOUR, GSDR OFFICIALS WILL PROBABLY NOT RPT NOT USE SAME TECHNIQUE FOLLOWED WITH QUINT -- A HASTY, GRUDGING AND INCOMPLETE TOUR FOLLOWING A FIVE DAY WAITING PERIOD IN MOGADISCIO. IF MORE LEISURELY INSPECTION OF AREA IS BEING ARRANGED, THEN WE CAN ALSO EXPECT SOME SUITABLY APPROPRIATE IMPROVISATION FOR THE MISSILE HANDLING FACILITY, BARRACKS
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HIP, ETC. IN PRE-DEPARTURE BRIEFINGS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICIALS MIGHT ALSO ATTEMPT TO BEGIN TO MINIATURIZE ANY SUBIC OR CAM RANH BAY EXPECTATIONS.
HAMRICK

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